

## THE SEARCH FOR SIR JOHN FRANKLIN.

BY CAPTAIN SHERARD OSBORN, R.N.



The "Fox" in Harbour. (See page 385.)

IN 1848 the public alarm at the long-continued absence of Franklin's Expedition occasioned the search to be commenced. Those who were sent knew no more than Franklin did on leaving England of the geography of the vast region between Lancaster Sound and Behring's Strait; and in all that area, many tens of thousands of square miles, we had to seek two atoms—two ships. The labour was long and disheartening; for, with the exception of the discovery in 1850 of Franklin's winter quarters of 1845-46, under Beechey Island, no clue to their whereabouts was found until near the fall of 1854. That discovery at Beechey Island merely assured us that he was within the area above alluded to, and that his expedition had not perished, as some supposed, in Baffin's Bay. During those six years, however, the entire geography of the regions of Arctic America was made known; and, with the exception of a small portion around King William's Land, every coast, creek, and harbour thoroughly searched. A comparison of the two charts we have given, will best prove how much of this area was thus laid open; and it should be remembered, that these explorations were nearly all made by our seamen and officers on foot, dragging sledges, on which were piled tents, provision, fuel for cooking, and raiment. This sledging was brought to perfection by Captain M'Clintock. He made one foot journey in those regions with Sir James Ross in 1848 with the equipment then known to Arctic navigators, and such as Franklin probably had, and was struck with its imperfections, and the total impossibility of making long journeys with *matériel* so clumsy, and entailing so much unnecessary labour

upon the seamen. His suggestions were subsequently eagerly adopted, and in some cases improved upon by others; the consequence was, that whereas in 1848 we found our sledge-parties able to remain away from the frozen-in ships only forty days to explore two hundred miles of coast, those of Captain Horatio Austin's expedition were away for eighty days, and went over eight hundred miles of ground. And in Sir Edward Belcher's expedition the journeys extended over a hundred and odd days, and distances were accomplished of nearly 1400 miles!

In spite of these improvements, the labour and hardship entailed upon our seamen by these sledge-journeys remained extremely severe; and none but those who have witnessed it can conceive the constant suffering it entailed upon our men, or the unflagging zeal and earnestness with which they underwent it year after year, in the hope of discovering their lost countrymen. There were two points to be ascertained by the officers conducting the search in order to insure the utmost possible amount of work being done each season: the one was the maximum weight a strong man could drag through deep snow and over heavy ice for a consecutive number of days; the other was, to what temperature we could safely expose them, and upon how small a quantity of food.

The results obtained were curious. The maximum weight was ascertained to be 220 lb. per man; and of that weight 3 lb. per diem was consumed by each man for food and fuel—viz., 1 lb. of bread, and 1 lb. of meat, while the other pound comprised his spirits, tea, cocoa, sugar, tobacco,



and fuel for cooking. Upon this estimate it was found that, for a hundred days' journey, they could march ten miles per diem, and endure a temperature with impunity of fifty or sixty degrees below the freezing-point of water. These facts we offer for the information of military authorities; and they should remember, that our men dragged their tents with them, and that the country traversed was one vast desert, affording only water, though that had to be thawed from snow, out of the daily modicum of fuel.

All this labour, however—all this generous expenditure of the legislature of England on behalf of her people, who entered deeply and earnestly into the sad question, What has become of Franklin?—brought back no information of his fate: and still further to test the perseverance which forms the best trait of our national character, the fall of 1854 witnessed the abandonment in icy seas of a noble expedition of four ships. It was indeed a catastrophe, though neither an officer nor a man was lost. The "I told you so" rang through the land of those who had long since got rid of the question by tumbling ice-bergs over on top of the Erebus and Terror; and those who felt convinced that the mystery would yet be unravelled, sighed, and knew not where to look for support. The skill and hardihood of the officers—the devotion and zeal of our sailors, and the accomplishment of the north-west passage by Captain Sir Robert M'Clure—were accepted by the public as some consolation for the wounded maritime pride of Britain in the inconclusive allied war with Russia, though it was decided that no further search should be made on the part of the Government.

Hardly had men declared the solution of the fate of the lost expedition a hopeless task, when in October, 1854, from the shores of Prince Regent's Inlet, appeared a traveller, Dr. Rae, bringing the conclusive information, which we mentioned in the end of our last number, of the starvation of a forlorn hope of forty men and officers from the Erebus and Terror, at the mouth of the Great Fish River. The Esquimaux from whom he obtained his intelligence, told him that the two ships had been beset, or wrecked, off the coast of King William's Land.

The lost expedition was thus reported to be in the centre of the square of unsearched ground, before alluded to. It would have been far more easily accessible to our various expeditions, whether by way of Barrow, or Behring's Strait, than many of the more remote regions explored by them; but, by a strange fatality, all our travellers turned back short of the goal, because they found no cairn, no trace, no record to induce them to push on towards it. However, that there the lost ships were, no one who knew anything of the matter could then doubt; and of course the natural conclusion under such circumstances was, that some one of the Arctic ships in our dockyards would have been immediately sent to close the search in a satisfactory manner, even though all hope of saving life might be at an end. The Admiralty and Government thought otherwise; all public endeavours ceased; and, as is too often

the case in Britain, private enterprise was left to crown the column which the devotion of a public profession had served to erect. At this juncture, the widow of Franklin stepped forth to carry out what the admirals in Whitehall and statesmen in Downing Street declared to be an impossibility. This energetic, self-reliant woman, seconded by a few staunch friends, pre-eminent amongst whom stood Sir Roderick Murchison, proceeded for the third time to try to carry out by private means what ignorance, rather than ill-will, prevented the Admiralty from executing, for, after the death of Barrow, and Beaufort, and the retirement of Admiral Hamilton, the only person left at the Board who understood the question was Admiral Sir Alexander Milne, and he stood alone in voting for a final Government expedition. Lady Franklin's plan was to send a single vessel down from Prince Regent's Inlet, or Cape Walker, towards King William's Land. Twice already had she been foiled in this identical scheme; though on the last occasion the discovery of Bellot's Strait, leading direct to King William's Land, paved the way for her final effort.

An appeal to the public for pecuniary aid met with but partial success, and Lady Franklin had to sacrifice all her available property and live humbly in lodgings to enable her to meet the necessary expenses attendant on the purchase of a fine screw schooner yacht, the Fox, and her equipment for arctic service. Many able officers of the naval and mercantile marine came generously forward and volunteered their gratuitous services. Amongst the first was Captain George H. Richards; but hardly had his offer been accepted, when the Admiralty appointed him to the Plumper for a survey of Vancouver's Land. His place was almost immediately filled by Captain Leopold M'Clintock, whose high reputation during years of continuous service in those frozen seas rendered his acquisition an omen of perfect success.

Various circumstances combined to retard the departure of the gallant little Fox, and it was not until July, 1857, that she and her noble company put forth from Aberdeen. Round Captain M'Clintock stood twenty-five gallant men, including three officers and an interpreter. Allen Young, a generous captain of whom the merchant service have good reason to be proud, went as sailing-master, and not only gave his services gratuitously, but threw 500*l.* into the general fund for expenses. Lieutenant Hobson, of the Navy, served as chief officer, and Dr. Walker of Belfast, a young and rising medical man, went also to seek honour where so many of his gallant countrymen had already won it. Petersen, the Dane, who had spent half his life within the arctic zone, quitted Copenhagen at an hour's notice to aid Captain M'Clintock as Esquimaux interpreter; and amongst the men were many gallant fellows who had for years laboured under Her Majesty's pendant in the frozen north.

The Fox before long reached the edge of that vast belt of broken-up ice which all the summer stretches across the upper portion of Baffin's Bay, and is known under the general term of middle-ice. M'Clintock was late, the season unfavourable, his vessel a small one, yet he fought a gallant fight to



make his way to Lancaster Sound. Repulsed in one quarter, we see him doubling back to another, the tiny Fox struggling with a sea of ice-fields and icebergs—stout hearts and strong hands carrying her and her company through many a hair-breadth escape. The middle-ice, however, is too strong for them. In an unlucky hour they are imprisoned, ice surrounds them, water even in holes becomes daily less, winter sweeps down from her dreary home, and all that vast sea of broken ice becomes frozen together. They are beset for the winter, and must go with the ice wherever it pleases. Twenty-five men in a tiny craft drifting throughout that long dark winter, in the midst of a slow-marching pack, which ever rolls from the Pole to the Equator, was a strange and solemn spectacle. The calm and modest endurance of their six months' trial, as told by the gallant leader, is a thing to make one proud that such as they are our countrymen.

Late in April, 1858, the Fox may again be seen; she has approached the open sea; a furious storm arises, sending huge rollers under the ice, which heaves and rears on all sides. A battle for life commences between the stout yacht and the charging floes. Under sail and steam, she works out against all obstacles, and, thanks to a taper bow, escapes the destruction which would infallibly have overtaken a vessel of bluffer build. The sea is sighted, and eventually entered; all on board the Fox are well, all in good spirits, one of the company has alone perished by an accident. Fortune ever smiles upon the resolute, and the middle-ice no longer barred the road to Lancaster Sound; by the end of July the Fox had reached its entrance. The hardy whaling-men of Aberdeen and Hull, who had just returned to their fishing-ground from home, cheered the little craft on with many a hearty "God speed ye!" and shared with those on board the Fox their luxuries of frozen fresh beef and vegetables. Beyond the haunts of whale fishermen, and beyond those even of the still harder Esquimaux, the Fox must press on. Beechey Island is reached, and from the depôt of provisions left there by government expeditions, the now diminished stock of the schooner is replenished, and, favoured by an extraordinarily open season, Captain M'Clintock was able to reach Cape Walker and pass down Peel Strait towards King William's Land until brought up, on August 17th, by fixed ice, at a point twenty-five miles within its entrance. Baffled, but not disheartened, Captain M'Clintock bethought himself of the route suggested by Lady Franklin, by way of Prince Regent's Inlet and Bellot Strait, and with that decision which, combined with sound judgment, forms the most valuable qualification of an Arctic navigator, he immediately retraced his steps, and by the 20th, or three days later, was at the eastern entrance of Bellot Strait, watching for a chance to push through it into the western sea around King William's Land.

The scene in that strait was enough to daunt men less accustomed to such dangers. On either hand precipitous walls of granite, topped by mountains ever covered with snow, whilst to and fro, in the space between them, the ice was grinding and churning with great violence under

the influence of a fierce tide. Like a terrier at a rat-hole, the staunch Fox waited for an opportunity to run the gauntlet through this strait. This perseverance was partially rewarded, for on the 6th September they were able to reach its western entrance, though again to be brought up by a belt of fixed ice which stretched across the path, and was held together by a group of islands named after Sir Roderick Murchison. The winter of 1858-59 now set in, and, much to the chagrin of those on board the Fox, all hope of reaching the western sea had to be abandoned, although separated from them only by an ice-field six miles wide. An unusually cold and stormy winter had now to be endured by men debilitated by a previous winter in the packed ice of Baffin's Bay; and the resources of Boothia Felix yielded them in fresh food only eight reindeer, two bears, and eighteen seals. Against these privations, however, there was a feeling of perfect confidence that the returning spring would enable them to march to King William's Land, and solve the mystery.

On February 17th, Captain M'Clintock and Captain Young left the Fox to establish advanced depôts of provision for the summer sledge parties, a necessary measure which Lieutenant Hobson had been nearly lost in attempting to accomplish in the previous autumn. M'Clintock went south towards the Magnetic Pole, and Young westerly for Prince of Wales's Land. On the 15th March they both returned to the Fox, somewhat cut up by the intense cold and privation, but the cheers which rang through the little craft told that a clue had indeed been obtained to the fate of the Erebus and Terror. M'Clintock had met forty-five Esquimaux, and during a sojourn of four days amongst them had learnt that "several years ago a ship was crushed by the ice off the north shore of King William's Land; that her people landed and went away to the Great Fish River, where they died." These natives had a quantity of wood from a boat left by the "starving white men" on the Great River. The impatience of all on board the Fox to start with their sledges to the westward may be easily understood. The Esquimaux mentioning only one ship as having been sunk, gave rise to the hope that the other vessel would be found, and obliged Captain M'Clintock to detach a party under Captain Young towards Prince of Wales's Land, whilst he and Lieutenant Hudson went south for King William's Land and the Fish River.

On the 2nd of April the three officers left the ship with a man-sledge and a dog-sledge to each. Of Captain Young we may say that he made a most successful and lengthy journey, connecting the unexplored coast-lines of all the land to the northward and westward, and correcting its position, but without finding a single cairn or record left by Franklin. Captain M'Clintock and Hobson went together as far as the Magnetic Pole, and, before parting company, gathered from some natives that the second vessel, hitherto unaccounted for, had been drifted on shore by the ice in the fall of the same year that the other ship was crushed. Captain M'Clintock undertook to go down the east-side of King William's Land direct

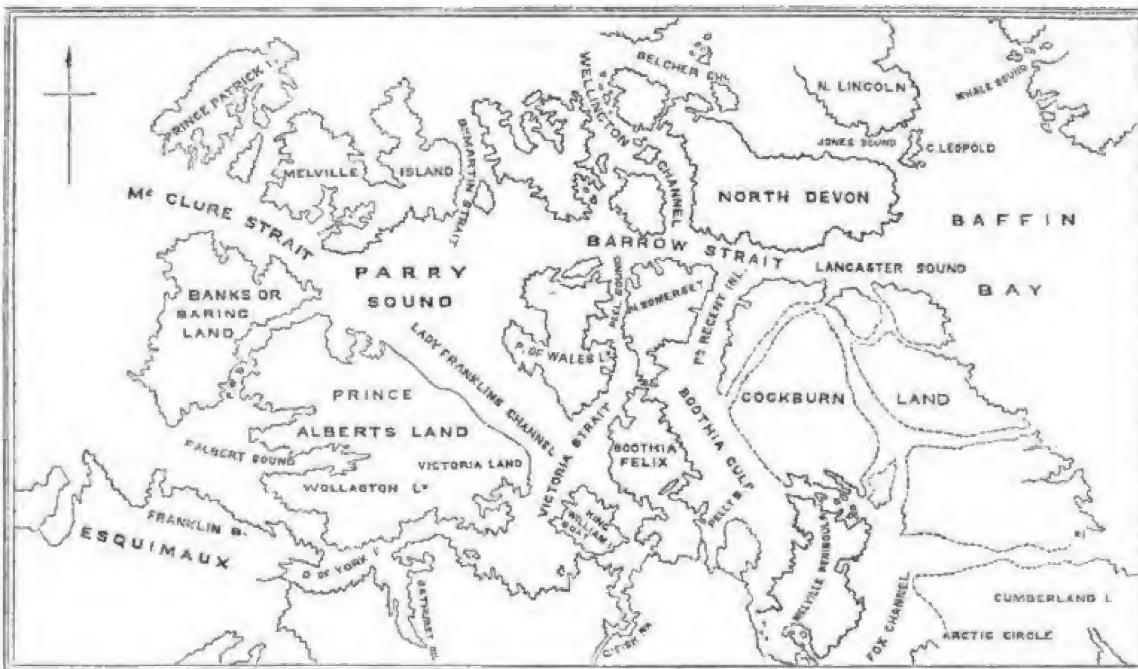


to the Fish River, and taking up the clue which Mr. Anderson's journey to Montreal Island, in 1855, afforded him,—follow it whither it led. Hobson had to cross to the North Cape of King William's Land, and push down the west coast as far as possible.

Captain M'Clintock, when half-way down the east coast of King William's Land, met a party of Esquimaux who had been, in 1857, at the wreck spoken of by their countrymen. Their route to her had been across King William's Land, and they readily bartered away all the articles taken out of her. An intelligent old woman said it was in the fall of the year that the ship was forced on shore; that the starving white men had fallen

on their way to the Great River, and that their bodies were found by her countrymen in the following winter. She told that, on board the wrecked ship, there was one dead white man,—“a tall man with long teeth and large bones.” There had been “at one time many books on board of her, as well as other things; but all had been taken away or destroyed when she was last at the wreck.”

The destruction of one ship and the wreck of the other, appeared, so far as M'Clintock could ascertain, to have occurred subsequently to their abandonment. No Esquimaux that were met had ever before seen a living white man; and, although great thieves, they appeared to be in nowise



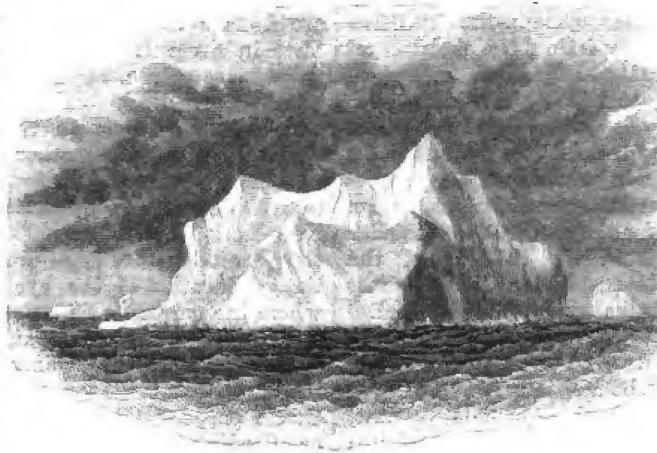
alarmed at Captain M'Clintock or his men. From this party the gallant captain pushed on for Montreal Island; but he found nothing more there than Anderson had reported, and in a careful sweep of the shores about Point Ogle and Barrow Island he was equally unsuccessful.

Returning to King William's Land he now struck along the south-western shores in the hope of discovering the wreck spoken of by the natives at Cape Norton. She must, however, have been swept away by the ice, in 1858, or sunk, for no signs of her could be discovered. The Esquimaux had evidently carried off every trace left by the retreating party between Cape Herschel and Montreal Island, except the skeleton of one man ten miles south of Cape Herschel, and the remains of a plundered cairn on the Cape itself. The skeleton lay exactly as the famished seaman had fallen, with his head towards the Great Fish River, and his face to the ground; and those who fancy that Fitzjames or Crozier would still have dragged log-books and journals to that river, must explain away the charge of common humanity which such an hypothesis involves, when they appear not to have had time to turn over, much less to bury, their perishing

comrades. Beyond the western extremity of King William's Land, the Esquimaux appeared not to have travelled, and from thence to Cape Felix the beach was strewn with the wreck of that disastrous retreat of Franklin's people, of which we endeavoured in an earlier number to convey some idea. Lieutenant Hobson had of course forestalled Captain M'Clintock in the discoveries made here, but what with the search made by that officer both on his outward and homeward march, as well as that subsequently carried out by Captain M'Clintock over the same ground, there cannot be much reason to suppose that any undiscovered documents exist; and all who know anything of those regions will agree with Captain M'Clintock in believing that all hope is now at an end of finding any one living of the unfortunate crews of the Erebus and Terror. With respect to the existence of abundance of animal life on King William's Land, the fact that only forty natives in all were found living on that island by Captain M'Clintock ought to be pretty conclusive: the Esquimaux would take care to be in any such Arctic paradise; and furthermore, had game been plentiful anywhere within a hundred miles of

the Erebus and Terror, it is not likely that those poor fellows would have quitted their ships in a season so rigorous, and so long before the Great Fish River would be open for navigation. We should be the last to say this, if there were a shadow of foundation for farther hope, either to save life or to obtain such records as would throw more light on the labours and zeal of those noble ships' companies.

As those men fell



in their last sad struggle to reach home, their prayer must have been that their countrymen might learn how nobly they accomplished the task they had voluntarily undertaken. That prayer has been granted. As long as Britain exists, or our language is spoken, so long will be remembered and related the glorious fate of the crews of the Erebus and Terror, and how nobly they died in the execution of their duty to their Queen and country.

